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Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

by Archie P. McDonald

This section provides notice of books and other publications concerned with Eastern Texas history. Elsewhere are formal reviews of other books written by scholars; herein are expressions of opinions of the editor about such.

Donald W. Whisenhunt, who formerly taught and administered things at the University of Texas in Tyler, moved to Nebraska, and now works at Western Washington University, has authored *Poetry of the People, Poems to the President, 1929-1945* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, OH 43403). Don has published several books on the Depression, is the editor of *Encyclopedia USA*, and edited the index to the first twenty volumes of our *Journal*. But Don's primary interest remains the Great Depression, especially its impact on ordinary folk. Herein are many poems arranged according to themes such as the bleakness of the Depression, President Herbert Hoover's role in causing-dealing with the economic plight, the New Deal, and other aspects of the era, with the overriding emphasis on FDR as the savior of the nation. Photos and cartoons are included. A New Deal baby, most of my memories of FDR are associated with WWII, but I still recall that voice on our Philco radio, and knew that even a spoiled child must be still when "Mr. Roosevelt" was on the air.

Ace Reid and the *Cowpokes Cartoons*, with an introduction by Elmer Kelton and foreword by Pat Oliphant, fulfills the dream of Madge Reid to see Ace's work featured in a collection that enlarges the cartoons beyond what is possible in daily newspapers to show off their art. Elmer worked with Ace when the cowboy cartoonist got his start at the *San Angelo Standard-Times* after World War II, and provides a biographical sketch that reflects their friendship; Oliphant is a transplanted South Australian whose foreword emphasizes the frontiersque similarities of his native soil to Ace's, something that F.E. Abernethy and I also observed in our visit to the Land Down Under in 1986 as cultural exports from the Sesquicentennial to South Australia's Jubilee 150 (at least the Aussies used a term everyone could spell). The cartoons are grouped as Work, Economics, Bankers, Weather, Ma-cowpoke Jake's long-suffering and overly tolerant wife, Outsiders, and Friends & Neighbors, but really there is only one theme: the hard life of the cowpoke in fairly modern West Texas. Yet much of it resonates with this East Texan who was baptized with cow manure in his father's and uncle's cattle commission business in the 1940s. We, too, knew drought, tough bankers, tight money, and other vicissitudes of the working side of life. Reid's line drawings present well this philosophy of dealing with hard times: laughing instead of crying.

The Law Comes to Texas: The Texas Rangers, 1870-1901 (State House Press, Box 15247, Austin, Texas 78761, paperback), continues Frederick Wilkins' history of the Rangers. Wilkins is rewriting the history of our state's legendary law enforcement agency in several volumes—I think at least

four—and remodeling the previous consensus on the subject laid out by Walter Prescott Webb in the 1930s. There are at least two schools of thought about Rangers, like everything else in Texas: the “liberal” line that early Rangers were at home on either side of the law and later Rangers were as much strike breakers and agents of perpetuating corrupt oligarchic rule as any thing else; and the “conservative” cause that holds these straight-shooting, right-minded, bastions of law-n-order in high regard. Gus McCrae or “Walker: Texas Ranger?” There is a little of both. Wilkins says his “only agenda in this tale is to tell an accurate story without apology, glorification, or revisionism” (p. xii), which means, I suppose, that “revisionism” is automatically pejorative. So here is the Ranger story from John B. Jones and L.H. McNelly to Ira Aten of fence-cutting wars fame, or the first focusing of Rangerdom on actual law enforcement as opposed to Indian hunting and service as quasi-soldiers. There are several appendices dealing with the organization of the Rangers, endnotes, and bibliography and index. The Rangers are among those topics that never tire us Texans, and here is a series that offers one more look at our guys who bore the badge and the gun and made a history for themselves, revised or not.

Sweetie Ladd's Historic Fort Worth: Paintings by Sweetie Ladd, with text by Cissy Stewart Lale (TCU Press, TCU Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129), presents reproductions of thirty-eight works in watercolor that feature historic buildings in Fort Worth. Ladd began painting in her sixties after working with husband Homer at the Ladd Furniture Company. Cissy tells us that Sweetie Ladd took her art seriously even if she did not admit it, and even studied in Spain, Paris, and Mexico. But when advising another artist who studied her folk-art, primitive style, Ladd told her to “just paint poorly, dear.” The watercolors depict historic buildings (some are interiors) and landscapes, but are filled with people doing things. Cissy Lale contributed a biographical essay on the artist and a commentary on each watercolor, and is well qualified to do so after a career of “covering” the Fort Worth scene as women’s editor for the *Star-Telegram*, the city’s distinguished newspaper. She also is a past president of the East Texas Historical Association. The publication was made possible by grants from Kay Dickson Farman, the Summerlee Foundation, and the Fort Worth Public Library and the Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library in memory of Irvin S. Farman.

The Historic Seacoast of Texas (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819), with paintings by J.U. Salvant and essays by David G. McComb, is another visual presentation of historic Texas. The artist headquarters in Austin and the essayist lives in Colorado, but both are familiar with coast. I met David when he joined our oppressed corps of master’s candidates at the old Rice Institute in 1959, so I know he knows about the Gulf Coast; besides, he has written excellent histories of Galveston and Houston, among other topics, and comes down out of the mountains once each year to renew his acquaintance with us. The subject, at least partially, is my first homeland, for it involves “The Sabine Crossing” and “The Bolivar Peninsula,” or the Gulf Coast from the Louisiana border to Galveston. Other chapters concern “Galveston Island,” “The Brazos Landing,” “Troubled Waters At

Matagorda Bay," "The Aransas Passage," "Corpus Christi And The Cowtowns Of The Coast," and "Padre Island–Shipwrecks And Tourists." Each features an essay on the area by McComb and one to four watercolors by Salvant. Mountaineers and prairie dwellers may find little with which to identify here, but beachcombers and others oriented to the coast will find a feast.

One of the questions asked on my doctoral oral exam addressed the "appropriateness" of using historical fiction to teach real history. Since I knew the interrogator favored such, of course I endorsed the methodology. Since, I have come to a more sincere accommodation of it because of the observation that the majority of us learn more of our history through fictional film and literature than from traditional lectures and "serious" tomes. The premium, then, is for the fiction to be as factual as possible. Here are two good examples: *Wave High The Banner: A Novel Based On The Life Of Davy Crockett*, by Dee Brown (University of New Mexico Press, 1720 Lomas Boulevard NE, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1591), and *Alamo Heights*, by Scott Zesch (TCU Press, TCU Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129). The novel "based on the life of" David Crockett first appeared in 1942 and was republished with a biographical section on Brown by Paul Andrew Hutton, our contemporary Alamo and Western history scholar. *Alamo Heights* concerns not the battle for the Alamo in which Crockett and a few male friends engaged in 1836; instead it is an account of the battle for preservation of the original battle site waged by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas three quarters of a century later. Take your history where you find it, I always say—and did so on my doctoral exam, too.

Here is an interesting way to combine a "sweet tooth" and an interest in historical preservation: *Sweet Heritage, A Collection Of Dessert Recipes And Biographies From Days Gone By...A Baker's And Genealogy Enthusiast's Delight* (Franklin County Historical Association, Box 289, Mount Vernon, TX 75457, \$16), sent by B.F. Hicks, the principal preserver of Mount Vernon's and Franklin County's history. *Sweet Heritage* contains an overview of Franklin County's story, historic photographs, and fifty-two pages of recipes for cakes, fourteen pages on candies, twenty-two pages on cookies, twenty-one pages on "miscellaneous desserts," and forty-three pages on pies. Each recipe includes biographical sketches on Franklin County pioneers and predecessors, usually the original source of the recipe, and the contemporary contributor of each is acknowledged. Recognition is given to Hicks, Jean Ann Marshall, Rae Harper, Martha Hare, and Patricia Evans for gathering and preparing the collection. I have a background in the dessert/history combination. I once had a graduate student who was accused of "cooking" her way to a master's degree by her otherwise thoroughly supportive husband because she rarely appeared for a thesis conference without an exquisite dessert in hand. It helped that she was an excellent student, but the "lucious lemon bars" did not harm her case with the thesis committee.

Old Friend, mentor, and ETHA Past President Ralph A. Wooster's latest publication is *Civil War Texas: A History And A Guide* (Texas State Historical

Association, 2.306 Sid Richardson Hall. University of Texas, Austin TX 78712, \$7.95), a part of the *Fred Rider Cotten Popular History Series*. The series was the idea of another friend, Lee Lawrence, during his tenure as president of TSHA. Wooster's eighty-two page monograph is an excellent sketch of this pivotal period. It is divided into five chapters, and concludes with a chronology of events, notes, and index, and suggestions for additional reading. "Then And Now" sidebars scattered through the text, plus many illustrations, provide an attractive appearance. *Civil War Texas* would make an excellent reading assignment for college or secondary classes—and a good refresher for old know-it-alls like your correspondent, who first learned what he knows about this war in Wooster's class at Lamar University during the Middle Ages.

Another past president, Bill O'Neal, the sage of Panola College, has produced yet another shooter book, *A Half Century of Violence in Texas: The Bloody Legacy of Pink Higgins* (Eakin Press, Box 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159, \$18.95). Bill is our authority on baseball and gunfighters. Herein he introduces us to John Calhoun Pinkney ("Pink") Higgins, a shooter among the best of them, though not, says Bill, a pathological killer, merely an efficient and successful one. I love this blurb: "I didn't kill all them men—but then again, I got some that wasn't on the bill, so I guess it just about evens up."

Another Eakin publication—see address above; price \$14.95—is *Rezepte: German-Texan Culinary Art When Everything Was Hausgemacht*, by Nevilee Maass Weaver. As an accomplished writer of such—O.K., I only wrote one cookbook—this interests me so I can add variety to the fare served to a certain Uppity Woman. What we have here is on Texas-German cooking and lore, followed by recipes on the preparation of *Fleisch* (meat), *Sosse* (sauce), *Suppe* (soup) and *Salat* (salad), *Brot* (bread), *Kuchen* (cake), *Kleines Backwerk* (little pastry), and *Eingemachtes* (canning), with an index to recipes. This alternation of German and English continues in the titles of individual recipes, but fortunately the directions are in American English. Interspersed are box homilies; I like this one on page 28 because even the translation has to be translated: *Die Suppe Ausessen Mussen*, which means The Soup Must All Be Eaten which means You Have To Abide By The Consequences. *Bon Appetite*, or however you say that in German.

Madge Thornall Robert's third volume, *Sam Houston: The Personal Correspondence, 1848-1952* (University of North Texas Press, Box 311336, Denton, TX 76203-1336), continues a series which won our Ottis Lock Best Book on East Texas Award with its initial volume and brings it within a single volume of conclusion. Houston represented Texas in the US Senate during these years, so even his personal correspondence was laden with political matters; but also here are family concerns. The series is an important one. Although Houston was the subject of several excellent biographies, some with revisionist tendencies, during this decade of his Bicentennial, the equally valuable resource of his correspondence remained as it had been for over half a century in the previous edition of Amelia Williams and Eugene Barker.

Every research library needs these volumes.

Almost too late for the flood of WWII books, but still a good read, is Samuel E. Stavisky's *Marine Combat Correspondent: World War II In The Pacific* (An Ivy Book by Ballentine Publishing Group, 201 East 50th St., New York, NY 10022, 1999, \$6.99). Stavisky worked for the *Washington Post* when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor; that grim news made him attempt to enlist in the Army and Navy but both turned him down because he could not pass the eye examination without coke-bottle glasses, a requirement for combat. So the Marines took him in as a Combat Correspondent, or, as are all Marines, a rifleman first and then a correspondent who had a license to prowl the Pacific Theatre to find "hometown hero" stories that would give the service good press at home. In this capacity Stavisky saw more combat than most mainline personnel, and did so in more places than most. It is a good companion piece to James A. Michener's *Tales Of The South Pacific*.

Martha Tannery Jones continues her excellent work for younger readers in *Terror From The Gulf: A Hurricane In Galveston* (Hendrick-Long Publishing Company, P.O. Box 25123, Dallas, TX 75225), which tells the story of the worst natural disaster yet sustained in the continental United States. The famed Galveston hurricane on September 8, 1900, took over 6,000 lives and destroyed what was then Texas' largest city. The story is told from the viewpoint of Charlie Byrd and family, fictitious stand-ins for real people who endured the mighty winds and waves that swept over the island. This is a good way for young readers to learn about the consequences of nature.

Gregg Cantrell's eagerly anticipated biography, *Stephen F. Austin, Empresario of Texas* (Yale University Press, P.O. Box 209040, New Haven, CT 06520-9040), officially released in October 1999, arrived just in time for inclusion in our column for this issue. As one who has worked at an institution named for SFA, and one who has taught Texas history for thirty years, this is an event. It probably won't attract as much attention as the release of James A. Michener's *Texas* in 1985, but it should. Sometimes the stars line up, or, more accurately, sometimes a young person takes on a challenge considered too formidable for a couple of generations, and things work out just right. What that means is: the publication of Eugene Barker's *Life of Stephen F. Austin* in 1925 preempted the field for three-quarters of a century. My generation, and the one that preceded it, considered Barker's the definitive biography of the founder of Anglo Texas, or perhaps we were just too awed by the shadow of Barker. Along comes this brash young scholar. The product is magnificent. I like especially Cantrell's introduction and epilogue. The introduction places Barker's work in line with Fredrick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis and explains the more recent interpretations of New West historians succinctly and well; the epilogue traces the hard work of Austin family descendants, mostly Bryans, because, of course, the bachelor SFA had no direct descendants, in making Austin the man into the monument for whom cities, universities, and much else has been named. Cantrell said he would stick closely with Austin, and he does, but he does not fulfill one other goal articulated in the

introduction—that this would not be a history of the “times” of Austin. To the contrary, it is an excellent history of Austin’s time, whether in Missouri or Mexican Texas. As a veteran writer/teacher of some of Austin’s times, I was gratified to find confirmation of most of what I have written and taught about Austin, found myself corrected in some instances, and learned much, much more than I have ever known, especially the circumstances of Austin’s imprisonment in Mexico. This is more than just an important publication of Texana; it is an event, perhaps even a pivotal event, in the scholarship of that genre. More than just me will say, however more silently, “I wish I could have done that.”